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ABSTRACT

This paper speaks in terms of "globalism" rather than "globalization," of a "culture of difference" rather than of cultural difference, of an "industry of knowledge" rather than of knowing. The paper first considers the argument that new communications technologies and systems are bringing cultures together merely by forging global interconnectedness. A close examination of the way new information and communications technologies and systems (NICTS) "map" the globe demonstrates that it is not weblike and all encompassing but rather mirrors the aircraft flight paths which historically carried high-volume traffic between northern centers and ex-colonial capitals. Pointing out that concerns about cultural imperialism are already manifest in the cultural policy formulations of many nations, the paper considers Australia's National Cultural Policy Document "Creative Nation." The paper next uses the term "culture of difference," rather than "different cultures," to describe an (information economy driven) transnational culture based on an information economy which derives its particularity through the process of subsuming cultural differences. Lastly, the paper examines what exactly "knowledge industries" are. Noting that previously the critical work on cultural futures emphasized the place and work of culture as a "set of relations and practices which act upon the social, transforming it in certain ways," the paper contends that, rather than separate the goals for action through "successor" epistemological frameworks, people can work toward preferred outcomes for learning to know, to do, to live together, and to be--those appropriate to a globalizing cultural context--by identifying the strengths of "different" disciplinary and epistemological approaches and adopting a critical stance which challenges the privileging of familiar ground. (Contains 30 references.) (BT)

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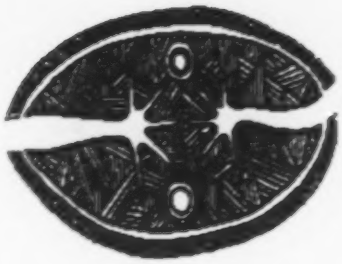

InSEA

"The Art of Globalism - The Culture of Difference - The Industry of Knowledge"

by

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Introduction:

The principal theme of the InSEA World Congress - *Cultures and Transitions* and its sub-themes, *Learning to know, Learning to do, Learning to live together* and *Learning to be* "recognise the complexity of the world as it enters the new millennium" and address the agenda of unity among nations promoted by the UNESCO Report on Education.

Predictions that our daily lives will become increasingly complex and, at the same time, the compression of space and time afforded by new telecommunication systems will shift cultures toward oneness have tended to dominate millennial discourses. These predictions have as their basis the argument that a combination of information technology and new scientific research into the 'why' (rather than the 'what' and the 'how') of our life-worlds is exacerbating complexity. Related claims that, in the era of the 'shrinking globe' we are now "a world culture" (Hannerz, 1990:237) cause us to speculate on what is really meant by these terms, and to reflect upon the basis for our own enterprise as artists and educators in the production and reproduction of knowledge. Such reflection involves the questions: "What do notions of computer mediated and information-related 'complexity' and 'world culture' imply for the work of art in culture?" and "What epistemological frameworks and pedagogical styles will be appropriate to the socio-cultural shifts required to meet the UNESCO aims for being and living together in such a world?

The corporate sector would have us believe that it can provide us with the answers to our predicament:

> "We are in a global economy and in the middle of a revolution: the dawn of knowledge industries. It is a different game, and is all about harnessing and rewarding people who make a living from ideas and strategic problem solving. They are the original thinkers, have analytical powers and are fuelled with an abundance of creativity. .... The existing perceived differences (gender/culture) increasingly will not matter. Whatever difference will become an asset, a richer mix for the toolbox..." (Caine 1998:13)

> "Diversity IQ" is the basic measure of the capacity to survive and prosper in the Age of (Internet) Access ... built on the ability to move freely and tolerantly among people of various races, cultures, backgrounds, and beliefs." (Taylor, & Wacker, 1997)

This new axiology of difference, when viewed in the context of a reconfiguration of the core business of the so-called 'global information economy' as 'the knowledge industry' deserves closer attention. In addressing the question "Why is 'difference' suddenly accorded positive value within consumer capitalism which has 'sameness' as the basis for its operation?" I have chosen to speak in terms of 'globalism' rather than globalisation; of a 'culture of difference' rather than of cultural difference; of an 'industry of knowledge' rather than of knowing. The turn of these terms is both deliberate and deliberative.

The Art of Globalism:

An 'art', according to Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopedie* (Stafford, 1993:392) is "the power of doing something not taught by nature and instinct; as, to walk is normal, to dance is an art; a science..." I use term 'globalism' rather than the common term 'globalisation' here to suggest an ideology rather than a process. (The angry red underscore which appears as I 'process' this word exemplifies ideology at work in the mode of information technology: 'globalism' is not a *Microsoft*™ word.)

It is important to pause a moment here to consider whether we can accept the argument that new communications technologies and systems are bringing cultures together merely by forging global interconnectedness. Although it is widely acknowledged that the world-wide-web is facilitating the dissemination of ideas, that this is occurring worldwide, in 'real-time' is not so widely accepted:

> ...(i)n practice, while the spread of new communications technologies is global in scope, there is a significant telecommunications gap between developed and developing countries; indeed there are huge disparities in access

even to a basic telephone. The extent to which modern communications have penetrated domestic societies remains very uneven, and in developing countries in particular their availability tends to be restricted to major urban areas (Bretherton, 1996:4-5.)

A close examination of the way new information and communications technologies and systems (NICTS) 'map' the globe demonstrates that it is not weblike and all encompassing, but rather, mirrors the aircraft flight paths which historically carried high-volume traffic between Northern centres and ex-colonial capitals. The 'routers' which channel computer-generated information can be identified predominantly as nodes which connect the established universities and defence-funded super-computing research centres of industrialised countries. Regulatory and other practices, which contribute to the infrastructure of this global network, are not universal, but subject to local conditions and strategic 'gatekeeping.' Further the suggestion that NICTS will effectively create one, harmonious 'global village' is also a contentious one. Scholars of international relations have argued that, in fact, rather than encourage peace and common feeling, interdependency through trade appears to have had the opposite effect. As interactions among civilisations occur in response to the increase in communications, as has been the case with trade and travel, "people increasingly accord greater relevance to their civilizational identity" (Huntington, 1996:66.) Just as internationalism came to be understood as the ideological face of Western imperialism, justified on the basis of modernisation (or industrialisation), globalisation can be seen similarly as a high-tech extension of this practice, to suit the operations of transnational corporations. Hartmann (1997), for example, argues that the globalising tendencies of NICTS are merely symptoms of the "retro-movement' of the electronic frontier of the US information economy across the Atlantic which "proceeded within Europe towards the East with considerable delay" (Hartmann, 1997.) With Internet access in Eastern Europe between 10 and 100 times more expensive than in the USA (by hourly costs of a local telephone connection over the month) Hartmann saw CEC claims that Europe was "the coming heartland of electronic commerce, pushed by those investments and numerous IT-policy 'action plans'" - a common political strategy in nation-states - utterly unconvincing. He argued, however, that the fear of loss of cultural diversity was justified, given that the impact of computer mediated communication in an information economy on the CEC was not really known or understood beyond competition, and there had been no acknowledgement that "(c)ultural differences express themselves through different use of communication and techniques: a technical interface is always also a cultural one."

Concerns about cultural imperialism are already manifest in the cultural policy formulations of many nations. Australia's National Cultural Policy Document *Creative Nation* (Commonwealth of Australia, 1994) is no exception - its first paragraph warns "what is distinctively Australian about our culture is under assault from homogenised international mass culture." This policy document specifically addresses this issue with its declaration of a bias toward support for technology-based arts which focus on 'national' content. The discourses of *Creative Nation* were those of fear of economic and cultural domination - already experienced through mass-media forms such as film, television, and now, multi-media. The policy focussed on supporting the preservation and promotion of Australian culture (defined in the document as that which "encompasses our entire mode of life, our ethics, our institutions, our manners and our routines, not only interpreting our world but shaping it") through its capture in digital form, and processing into a 'multimedia' product. As Adorno (1991) argues:

> (t)he concept of technique in the culture industry is only in name identical with technique in works of art. In the latter, technique is concerned with the internal organisation of the object itself ... its inner logic. In contrast, the technique of the culture industry is, from the beginning, one of distribution and mechanical reproduction, and therefore always remains external to its object.

The industrialisation of culture has required the introduction of protective legislation (as has been the case in France) by nation-states to ensure the survival not only of cultural productions, but also of 'native' languages against erosion. Fear of 'total eclipse' by the Internet's dominant language - English - can be seen to be justified when official websites (such as the Australian Government's *Austweb* site which claims - despite the existence and currency of Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages - that English is the only language spoken in Australia. This misinformation remains despite ongoing Indigenous community requests to the site developers - the Department of Foreign Affairs - that it be made accurate (Lenoy, 1999). There is, however, a further crucial issue for colonised cultures in the use of the Internet as a repository for information for use by the colonising culture. Aside from the issue that such mis-information contributes to the production of exclusionist knowledge, there is the more problematic issue of the publication on the internet of appropriated secret and sacred information. This latter instance causes even more anguish when it occurs in the higher education sector - which should know better.

International business management consultants were commissioned by the Australian Government to undertake research for its Department of Industry Science and Technology, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Communications and the Arts and to report on "international trends in investments and strategic alliances targeting content, the perceptions and awareness of Australia as a place to source or invest in content, the demand characteristics of the industry and the corporate and financial structures utilised by developers of multimedia content." The report (Coopers & Lybrand, 1995:5) recommended support for "excellence in content ... a product that sells and creates demand for further content." The implications of the demand for excellent in content were seen to reside in the domain of education. The Senate of the Australian Parliament then resolved to conduct an inquiry into arts and cultural education through its Environment, Recreation, Communications and the Arts Reference Committee. Their report *Arts Education: Report by the Senate Environment, Recreation, Communications and the Arts References Committee* (Commonwealth of Australia: 1995:v.) was prefaced with an expression of alarm by Chair, Senator John Coulter of the Australian Democrats, South Australia, at "the growing dominance of the view - the dominant paradigm - that has come to be called economic

rationalism" and that "While "*Creative Nation* is good for the professional producers of 'artistic products'; how good is it for those whose creative activities have nothing to do with the market economy?"

The Culture of Difference:

I use the term 'culture of difference' rather than 'different cultures' to describe an (information economy driven) transnational culture based on an information economy which derives its particularity through the process of subsuming cultural differences.

Formerly (geographically) distinct cultures are 'globalised' "through the increasing interconnectedness of varied local cultures, as well as through the development of cultures without a clear anchorage in any one territory" (Hannerz, 1990:246.) A resultant transnational culture, according to Hannerz, would most likely develop its own particularisms of the kind "which is elsewhere the special resource of locals: biographical knowledge of individuals, anecdotal knowledge of events and even of the constellations of locales, which form the settings of these cultures." According to Wacker (1998), "(b)orderless multinationals—corporations that function, in essence, as nation states—are themselves only the reflection of a more basic phenomenon: borderless consumers. For this is the deeper reality behind the surface one of the globalised marketplace: Connectivity has worked:

> The computing revolution has fused with the communication revolution to create a global intersection of people and opportunity ... As the world's population touches—through global computing, through global media—people are becoming more alike. Absent artificial borders to divide us, our tastes and attitudes are homopholizing. A love of sameness is rising within us. Globally, we are developing a shopping list of identical wants and needs, and it is this shopping list that both feeds and drives the global marketplace."

Immediate and personalised interaction between people who otherwise may never meet is viewed generally as a positive change effected by networked computer-based communication because it encourages a wider experience of cultures other than our own 'local' cultures which was previously only open to inter-national travellers. Late last century, and early this century, experienced world-travellers (or 'globe-trotters') where considered to exhibit a certain 'cosmopolitan' demeanour. "Cosmopolitans" were perceived to carry special knowledge which could be "quickly and shiftingly recontextualised in a series of different settings" (Hannerz, 1990:246). According to Hannerz, this special knowledge comprised a particular orientation toward structures of meaning to which the notion of the 'culture of critical discourse' refers - ie., one, which is "reflexive, problematizing, concerned with metacommunication and generally expansionist in its management of meaning." Internationalism's "Cosmopolitans" constituted a "new class" who came equipped with "decontextualised cultural capital." The notion of a 'world culture' has several implications for the work of art in an 'information' culture. Many of us are seduced by the information medium but feel decidedly uncomfortable with its cultural and economic imperatives to sameness which threaten to commodify what it makes scarce: any remaining 'difference'. Difference, once identified, can then be appropriated and monopolised.

Cultural exchanges and international expositions, historically, have been strategic tools for the harmonisation of international trade relations. Artists and cultural theorists participating in the "Crossing Borders: temporal and spatial" fora on day two of the Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT3) Conference, *Beyond the Future* (recently convened by the Queensland Art Gallery, Griffith University and the Australian National University) drew attention to the uncritical acceptance of the construction of difference embedded in the links between transnational corporations, international 'diplomacy' and the cultural policies of participating nation-states in this 'regional' event. Of crucial importance is the inevitability that certain constructions impose and promote unwanted categorisations and act to include some and exclude others. For many APT3 participants, one of the greatest ironies of the fora was University of California Professor Connie Samaras's distressed plea for recognition of the place of The Americas in definitions of the Pacific Rim, and for issues of class, rather than identity difference to be addressed. Given the centrality of West Coast USA's silicon valley to the technologies of globalisation, and our acute awareness that, to use Huntington's (1996:6) words "the non-Wests see as Western what the West sees as universal ...What Westerners herald as benign global integration, such as the proliferation of worldwide media, non-Westerners denounce as nefarious Western imperialism" Connie's plea was particularly courageous. But when we focus, as she asked us to, upon issues of class and gender, and consider the processes of production of NICTs which exploit and physically disable (blind) the Mexican, Thai and Korean women whose sweated labour produces the silicon chips for the computers of so-called 'knowledge industry' then we cannot turn away from this plea.

Resistance by artists to the forms of oppression achieved through 'the mode of information' requires a knowledge of the specificities of the information medium in order to strategically recontextualise what it decontextualises. Strategies of ironic reappropriation - not only of the 'frontier' jargon of Cyberspace cowboys, but also of programming languages, have become central to the emancipatory agendas of NetArtists, as "digital homesteads of artists verge on the brink between commercial and maverick mentality. They keep a data-space for the imagination to soar, for community structures to be tested, and for political consciousness to evolve and be redefined." (Jahrmann, 1997) Women media artists have created many www homesites to interconnect with others from many diverse cultures and geographical locations (including Australia) for the purposes of positive work on identity. Kathy Huffman (1996) co-convened the *Faces List* and co-created *Face Settings*, an interactive site for women conceptually organised around virtual and real dinner parties (because cooking food is a traditional tool for female community building), such as the event held at *Ars Electronicia* profiled on *Face Settings* site. The site links conferences, articles, interviews, conversations, recipes, stories, and organises 'flesh meets'

(or 'IRL' - in real life - meetings) and events such as *the Face 2 Face @Forum Stadtpark Graz: The Body,Identity and Community in Cyberspace* in 1998 which brought together women from eight countries. Jarman's (1997) observation that email is the most effective means to build community is supported by the extent of interactions of between women on the *Faces List* or 'faces' (the term list-members use to refer to ourselves.) Extensive and active, the list operates as an international cultural network for women artists and writers. The list and website effectively generate and record responses to issues - including human rights issues such as Australian Aboriginal Land Rights, raised in the ironic NetArt recipe *Yellowcake* (Bock, 1998) are then taken further into cyberstream via other fora, including international electronic arts and alternative video events, and the high-profile e-zine *Telepolis*. on a regular basis, via its 'pop~TARTS' feature column.

The questions raised and issues addressed in the *Faces* forum are those common to many other on-line groups - ie., the ways in which effective spaces might be created for social and cultural agendas, and how to organise action and interactions as communities. The *Faces* List has fostered community among women artists of many different nationalities, cultures and ethnic associations - despite the political differences between governments and regimes - on the basis of the desire for ethical relationships with each 'other.' Strategic in(ter)ventions in the critique and construction of knowledges (Grosz,1988) promote a model of self-knowing which does not disavow its own cultural location. The 'netiquette' of democratic forms of Internet communication requires individuals to own and be responsible for their own comments, thus suggesting a means of addressing the problem which arises from speaking for and as a category (or as Marxism would have it, a 'class'). As Judith Butler (1990:144) points out in her work on gender and difference, any proposal for self-knowing must deal critically with the subjectification of objectivity (the problem of "the 'I' that confronts its world, including its language, as an object, and the 'I' that finds itself as an object in that world") for "it is the subject/object dichotomy within the tradition of Western epistemology that conditions the very problematic of identity that it seeks to solve."

The Industry of Knowledge:

What exactly are "knowledge industries"? The search for an answer merely raises more questions. Is the technological instrumentalism driving globalism also the driving force for the industrialisation of knowledge in the so-called information age, or is knowledge being confused here with mere information? How does information become knowledge? How does information become knowledge? Whose knowledge? Caine's comment in my introduction, and the interconnection of the InSEA World Congress *Cultures and Transitions* sub-themes around 'learning to' suggest that a new set of knowledge skills is necessary for the generation of knowledges which are more appropriate to and applicable to our increasingly complex lived realities ("world"). What are the implications for the work of education through the arts at end of the millennium when globalisation has produced not one, but simultaneously two images of culture: "the first entailing the extension outward of a particular culture to its limit (the globe) and the other pointing to a compression of space, so that cultures 'pile up' upon one another and clash" (Featherstone,1995:7)?

That social and cultural uncertainties are growing in parallel with the now the rapid take-up of NICTS is not doubted. The globalising and dematerialising tendencies of NICTS continue to evolve discourses of disadvantage: homelessness, homesickness and related feelings of nostalgia for a more unified past, on the one hand, and on the other, celebratory dicourses: joy in a new found nomadology, in the destabilisation of modernism's fixed categories and identities, which began in the diasporic discourses of multi-culturalism (an outcome of economic migration) through the Inter-disciplinary studies of the 1980s. It is not surprising that at the end of the millennium Cultural Studies and Futures Studies have grown as intellectual disciplines in their own right. Cultural Studies generally, and to a significant degree, problematically, has generally accepted the view that its object, the concept 'culture' encompasses the whole way of life of a group or class (ie., the meanings, values and ideas embodied in institutions, in social relations, in systems of beliefs, in mores and customs, and in the uses of objects and material life.) Hannerz attributes the growth of cultural capital to the kind of critical discourses which have arisen out of the Cultural Studies discipline of the academic sector. These studies have informed the cross-cultural training programmes which Hannerz (1990:245) suggests are designed to "inculcate sensitivity, basic savoir faire, and perhaps an appreciation of those other cultures which are of special strategic importance to one's goals" that are now part of a burgeoning "culture shock prevention industry" which was growing alongside the emergent "transnational culture."

The discipline of Futures Studies is perceived to have given rise to a class of experts who have the ability to forecast, to prioritise and to manage and domesticate time. The weaknesses of the analytical-predictive aspects of futurist 'predictive' epistemological appoaches are perceived to be its tendencies to stretch time in a linear fashion across past, present and future; its openness to appropriation by technocracy; its tendency to reinforce existing power relations and structures, and its tendency to leave unchallenged assumptions of 'the real.' What is more, in empirical predictive approaches such as trend analysis, creativity is often not actualized, and only microlevel theories of change tend to be proposed. Inayatullah (1990) argues for a critical futures approach which fuses many disciplines and cultural perspectives, and enables a shift from the human-centeredness of the Western Humanities tradition through the adoption of perspectives drawn from a range of civilisational and socio-biological epistemological frameworks. In the search for more enabling understandings of the ways in which the future could be conceived, critical futurism focuses on the embeddedness of epistemological premises which take particular forms, and give privilege to certain concepts, theories, political alignments, and concerns.

Inayatullah's work is particularly useful in the present context for its focus on the politics of information (that more Inayatullah's work is particularly useful in the present context for its critique of the politics of information (that more information draw from facts about the past and future 'trends analysis' will lead to better administrative decisions) and the politics of decision making (those which leave unexamined the needs and expectations of both the administrator and the

planner.) Further, the 'information' approach assumes a 'perfect mind' similar to the computer: "instant recall, large amounts of information, and the ability to use new information to remodel old" (Inayatullah, 1990:117-118.) This 'synthetic rationality' (or computer model) of the mind overlooks notions of creativity, intuition and non-western multilayered theories of the mind. He reminds us that the assertion that a way of knowing is objective is simply an attempt to privilege one's ideological system over others. Although in critical (poststructural) epistemological approaches, scenarios are not developed, and no intelligible policy-making tends to result, nor does any theory of change emerge – Inayatullah argues that what does result is a 'making perculiar' or 'denaturalising' of the present. By virtue of its (perceived) global reach; its many-to-many, 'narrowcast' means of dissemination; and its openness to user interaction, the Internet is rendered by its users as, simultaneously, a multiciplicity of spaces or spheres of activity. These renderings of microcosmic life-world simulations operate to 'make strange' the notion of determinate realities, producing deterritoralised, dematerialised and 'denaturalised' social worlds of inter-personal relations and communal activities; public or civic spaces; marketplaces; and spaces for intellectual discussions which echo early 20th century notions of the 'Noosphere' or 'world brain.' It is precisely the capacity for simultaneity and simulation (or 'pure semblance' in theoretical terms) which has encouraged the Internet's idealisation as a 'second order' reality, freed from many of the inconveniences of a 'first order' reality. While there are certain parallels here with the way in which artists, traditionally, have created idealised worlds of the imagination, there appears to be a stronger conviction that any outcomes of engagements in these digitally rendered *virtual* or 'second order realities' are more able, somehow, to be extrapolated into a 'first order', or *actual* reality. While a virtual or second world utopia - one which has no real locality,and is merely a fantasic, untroubled region in which life is easy - might afford consolation, to unproblematically conceptualise this computer-generated and linked space as a 'second order' reality is to also unproblematically suggest that there is a first order, or 'more real' reality that precedes it - a proposition which, draws us into metaphysical debates.

Rather than resort to consoling ourselves with dreams of impossible utopian worlds, we could consider the heterotopic disorder we are experiencing - as globalising cultures meet and clash - as an opportunity to use the positive potential of NICTS to challenge old, unsatisfactory orders, and open up our vision to possible futures. In Foucault's analytics:

> *Heterotopias* are very disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together'. This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*; heterotopias (such as those to be found so often in Borges) dessicate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences. (Foucault, 1970: xviii)

Fine artists, historically, have readily embraced new technologies as tools, as 'means.' New technological inventions have always had the effect of not only causing artists to experiment, but to look anew upon existing media and practices - for example, the invention of photography as an instantaneous means of recording reality freed painters to focus on the paint medium itself as a field of artistic enquiry. The manipulation of scanned photographs and the ease of replicability of computer-generated (or 'digital') art confronts high culture's absorption with an aesthetic theory of art whose axiology is dependent upon what Walter Benjamin (1936) called the 'auratic' quality, or phenomenal effect of an original work of art. Practitioners use the term "New Media" to define an arts practice which is conceptually linked to NICTS. Within the practice of culture, New Media Arts has emerged as a distinct but hybrid artistic endeavour, dependent upon and engaging with new technologies, bringing together knowledges from a range of formerly discrete disciplines. Since the evolution of graphical world-wide-web browser software, New Media Arts has evolved a new form (NetArt) for a new communal space which is not only its host but its conceptual focus. This embrace of NICTS can be seen to be the anthesis of what high-culture privileges (art's originality, its a-sociality - its functionlessness and oppositionality), and may be considered by some to be merely a Deleuzian 'obscenity' of ecstatic communication (for its own sake.) However an analysis of the specificities of the Internet 'in the mode of information' (Poster,1992) reveals neither a mono-dimensional nor a uni-directional mass communication mode.

In a networked-computer environment, where human action is increasingly given over to customised software, (or, said another way, to those who script its performance on behalf of certain vested interests) artists seeking agency in cultural transformation have had to re-conceptualise a practice appropriate to emerging human/technology/world relations - in particular, the notion of artificial agency. Artificial agency is exemplified in the collection of information by so-called 'intelligent' search engines - pieces of 'enabling' software which *learn* to discriminate (on the basis of a 'synthetic' record of consumption habits) and to 'push' certain information at the user, and 'pull' certain information from the user whenever she or he 'logs on.' Our a highly controlled digital telecommunications system allows for an instantaneous 'techno-fix' to be instituted to include or exclude the activities of certain groups on the basis of 'authorising' policies, protocols, and associated regulatory practices. This situation has given rise to the emergence of a New Media Arts avant-gardism which is synonymous with creative hacking. The asymmetrical relations of power surrounding NICTS through the arts are being subjected to the kind of action which continues the tradition of avant garde activists of the early 20th century, who held a long and accepted place "as the tolerable boundary of coherence for the mainstream, a safety valve for handling its own excesses" (Grosz, 1995:18.) Grosz suggests that as a tool for avoiding essentialism, 'style' has advantages over subjectivity as an index of political position but only "insofar as they (avant garde texts) share a common enemy - the rule-governed operations of a phallocentric symbolic order." Any potential for art as a form of agency in effecting change can be seen to rely on a critical assessment of the sources of influence and power in human/technology/world relations,

and, in the light of the centrality of the computer to the digital project, suggests a focus on the interface, across which all interactions flow as coded 'bits.' NetArtists are applying new knowledges (tech-know-how, or 'hacks') (Heemskerk, J. & Paesmans, D. 1998; Starrs, 1998) at the level of binary codes. Their provocations represent a conceptual shift beyond Benjamin's argument for agency through technological reproducibility to an argument which for agency through technological 'replicability' or simulation. They work beyond the theory of the mass reception of a work of art to a theory of 'unmassed' dispersal of the work according to the many-to-many (as opposed to the one-to-many) model of communication. This is a shift in the gauge of the political potential of the medium from working class/ruling class at the level of the nation-state to between the microcosmic and macrocosmic (by virtue of the disappearance of the nation state in a local/global paradigm.) Their's is a perceptual shift from a dichotomous view of cultural production as inherently 'high' or 'low' to a view which takes account of the specificities of this new medium and its conceptual matrix.

The question of the dematerialisation of culture (the realisation of virtuality) is not a new one in culture, for, as Zizek (1997: 58) argues, the question of materiality in the world of ideas, "is one of the genesis of semblance itself - how does the reality of bodies generate out of itself the fantasmatic surface, the 'incorporeal' sense event?" The 'realisation' of virtuality requires a knowing beyond the rational. Information mediated by the synthetic vision of satellite technology, coupled with geographic information systems (GIS) software, and ultrasonography in our 'digital' or 'information' age, is increasingly disembodied and disembodying. Coded as 'bits', this disembodied, decontextualised information lends itself to convenient compaction into the database of a synthetic, hierarchically ordered, non-intuitive 'memory system' for subsequent retrieval, endless replication, and/or regeneration as knowledge. Our unquestioned embrace of these forms of technological mediation and organisation, and the value we accord their use, suggest that we are willing subjects of an 'information storage' culture, fuelled by panic about our location in a stratified (first/third world) global society, driven by a transnational economy based on space/time compression in the high speed, computer-networked generation of information as capital. Unless we are vigilant in the critical recontextualisation of the information industry's de-contextualising processes, consumption of homogenised information will masquerade as the achievement of knowedge - about a world which does not match with our lived experience. This will be the achievement of technotopia: the convergence of once discrete media forms for communication through one channel, one medium - one way; the 'virtual' realisation of the monoculture so valued by transnational corporations.

Conclusion:

The critical work on cultural futures at the beginning of the nineties emphasised the place and work of culture as a "set of relations and practices which act upon the social, transforming it in certain ways" (Bennett, 1998.) Rather than separate the goals for action through 'successor' epistemological frameworks, we can work toward preferred outcomes for learning to know, to do, to live together and to be - those appropriate to a globalising cultural context - by identifying the strengths of 'different' disciplinary and epistemological approaches and adopting a critical stance which challenges our privileging of familiar (and therefore safe?) ground.

Paradoxically, the technotopic project - to reduce all to zeros and ones - has also offered the opportunity to give form to diverse 'virtual' cultures through the production of simulated 'worlds', spheres, or spaces, with their attendant problems and promises - within which communal cultural activities occur. . It may seem ironic that a critical realist philosophy (Bhaskar) is emerging alongside the impetus to virtuality. However the increase in human/non-human intra-action is forcing us to re-think notions of reality - of what it means to be human, and of who (or what) is empowered to act. Critical futurists have taken account of the 'discoveries' of 'new (or quantum) physics' and 'synthetic reasoning' in their revisitations of techno-scientific discovery, and propose the dissolution of the divide between nature and culture, a shift from a subjectivity that can be in any sense separate from objectivity, and a form of "agental realism" based on "the material consequences of constructing particular apparatuses of bodily production" (Haraway, 1997:24.) The increasing 'fuzzyness' of the boundary between human and machine locates the human/computer interface as the site for new theories of agency. Feher's **(1987)** argument that "the knowledge that describes our reality can be characterised as a set of ideas adequate to the mechanisms of power" underscores the imperative to identify the rules and practices which govern cultural projects, and therefore which would act to regulate, or prescribe, in advance, who are agents, and how they might act, in the production and dissemination of 'content'.

Although the globalising imperatives underlying the forced progression of NICTS have caused us to rethink constructions of identity and difference around geographical location, they do not eclipse, but rather extend the re-considerations that arise out of our experiences of face-to-face interactions. At APT3, where the work of 70 artists 'from the Asia-Pacific' piles up, meets, clashes, and encourages dialogue, Dr. Michael Mel, speaking as a Papua New Guinea Curator and Educator of Arts Educators, argued that identifications ought not be constrained within the categorisations and agendas of global politics where the basis of cultural difference is geographical. Rather than respond to the art of those 'othered' by the (Western) art tradition in the art-discipline-specific terms which permeate the discourses of those who speak about art, Mel encourages us to receive art at the spiritual and sensual level. Responding to the mood of despair which permeated the conference as the horrifying atrocities in East Timor's bid for independence were broadcast, others also argued that categorisations (such as Australia's construction 'Asia') should be unpacked and political issues addressed. Queensland Art Gallery's Julie Ewington, curator of Indonesian Art, discarded her prepared paper, showing instead images from an earlier collaborative project between Indigenous Australian, East Timorese and Indonesian artists which confronted the ongoing human rights issues in our region, and demonstrated an ethical relationship to the 'other' in a 'world' context.

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